

June 28, 2023

NIDCD's Commitment to Scientific Workforce Diversity and Health Disparities Research

In January 2021, NIDCD renewed its commitment to strengthening diversity in the scientific enterprise and addressing health equity with the formation of the National Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NDCD) Advisory Council's Diversity Working Group. NIDCD Director Debara L. Tucci, M.D., M.S., M.B.A., commissioned council members to provide recommendations to the institute to enhance its diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) efforts. Dr. Tucci charged the committee with transforming "the landscape of opportunity for people in the [NIDCD] mission areas."

The committee provided recommendations to NIDCD after convening multiple virtual meetings that included other council members and NIDCD staff. The committee also solicited feedback from a wide range of diverse stakeholders, as well as individuals at different investigator stages. These communications and meetings provided valuable input to the committee on both needs and proposed solutions, including changes already underway at NIDCD. The committee made specific recommendations on 1) increasing the number of investigators underrepresented in biomedical science (for example, by increasing opportunities at earlier career stages), and 2) expanding NIDCD's efforts in addressing health disparities. NIDCD leadership concurred with the committee's recommendations on expanding efforts to increase diversity in the biomedical workforce and health disparity portfolio. Below we share our progress on these initiatives.

Assisting Potential Grantees

NIDCD leadership developed a plan to strengthen our communication efforts to ensure that potential grantees are aware of opportunities at NIDCD. Specifically, we have:

1. Streamlined and enhanced ways for potential grantees to find funding information. The outcome of this effort was our [Building a Diverse Scientific Workforce](#) webpage, which states NIDCD's commitment to diversity and serves as an information hub for potential grantees to find funding announcements.
2. Improved equity in access to grant writing resources by establishing a [repository of successful grant applications](#) funded by NIDCD.
3. Enhanced transparency and visibility about the grant review process by providing instructions to all principal investigators who want to share additional information with the NDCD Advisory Council [through a letter of information \(LOI\)](#).
4. Continued to prioritize the diversity of scientific review panels by allowing [reviewers to self-nominate](#).

Developing a Diverse Pipeline

NIDCD has several established initiatives aimed at eliminating the funding gap for underrepresented scientists. We have long supported a number of these initiatives. For example:

- 1) Our [Research Supplements to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research](#) provide opportunities for individuals underrepresented in biomedical science at career levels spanning undergraduate to early-career professors.
- 2) We provide support specific to predoctoral trainees from underrepresented groups via the [NRSA F31 Diversity Predoctoral Fellowship](#).
- 3) We support postdoctoral trainees from underrepresented groups via [K99/R00 MOSAIC](#) awards and NIH's [Brain Research Through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies® \(BRAIN\) Initiative's Diversity K99/R00](#) awards.
- 4) Through [R13 conference grant](#) awards, we provide support for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to attend scientific meetings and conferences.

To bolster these longstanding and successful efforts, we've undertaken several new initiatives and activities. We have:

1. Expanded [opportunities for mentoring underrepresented scientists](#) through the R25: Mentoring Networks to Enhance Diversity in NIDCD's Extramural Research Workforce mechanism and increased opportunities for underrepresented scientists to participate in research through the R25: Enhancing NIDCD's [Extramural Workforce Diversity through Research Experiences program](#).
2. Launched a new funding opportunity for investigators underrepresented in biomedical science who are applying for an R01: the [NIDCD Research Opportunities for New Investigators to Promote Workforce Diversity](#) mechanism.
3. Developed a pilot program for high school and undergraduate students to join NIDCD-funded laboratories.
4. Recognized the impact of showcasing the diversity of current NIH grantees to inspire future applications. Thus, we now highlight our [diversity supplement grantees](#) on our website and provide supplement grantees with webinars on how to apply for additional funding as their careers progress. Examples include our recent webinars, open to all, on [NIDCD predoctoral fellowships](#) and [NIDCD postdoctoral training programs](#).

NIDCD offers additional opportunities to promote workforce diversity. For a comprehensive list of funding opportunities please visit our [training](#) website and the [Building a Diverse Workforce](#) webpage.

Increasing Opportunities to Study Health Disparities

NIDCD has historically supported health disparities research. Our prior efforts include the following funding opportunities:

- [Patient-Clinician Relationship: Improving Health Outcomes in Populations that Experience Health Care Disparities \(R01 Clinical Trial Optional\)](#)
- [Health Care Models for Persons with Multiple Chronic Conditions from Populations that Experience Health Disparities: Advancing Health Care towards Health Equity \(R01 - Clinical Trials Optional\)](#)

We also partnered with the [NIH Common Fund](#), supporting two clinical trials focused on health disparities research. [The first project](#) examines a new model of school-based, telehealth-driven preventive care in Appalachian schools to reduce loss to follow-up from school hearing screening and improve access to specialty care in rural environments. [The second project](#) evaluates technology-enhanced approaches to advance cancer health equity among diverse deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing populations.

To strengthen these efforts, we:

- Launched a new funding opportunity, [NIDCD Health Disparities and Inequities Research](#), that supports research on health inequities as it applies to our scientific mission.
- Participate in NIH-wide [funding opportunities that address the effects of structural racism on health disparities](#).

In summary, NIDCD has expanded opportunities in the areas of scientific workforce diversity and health disparities. We are committed to sustaining this effort and will continue to work with NIDCD council to strive toward a scientific workforce where all have equitable opportunities for advancement. We are excited to see how these opportunities advance the NIDCD mission and welcome submissions from researchers interested in these opportunities. For more information, please visit our [Building a Diverse Scientific Workforce](#) webpage.